

The Importance of Social Skills in Education

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Research Question:

Are social skills important in a child's education?

Rationale:

Research has shown that the development of social skills lays a critical foundation for academic success and the development of work-related skills. There is strong evidence that learning social skills predicts a child's academic success in kindergarten and throughout their academic learning. To insure the success of our students, it is important that we as parents and/or teachers take the time to ensure that our children develop good social skills. Unfortunately, many of our students are not learning these skills at home, thus it is imperative that teachers make time during each day to teach these critical skills and provide time and space for their students to practice them.

Literature Review:

- Here at Committee for Children, we believe teaching social-emotional learning (SEL) is as important as teaching math or language arts. (Committee for Children)
- Unfortunately, many kindergarten teachers report that over half their students start school lacking good self-regulation (Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Students with poor self-regulation have high rates of expulsion from school, especially in preschool classrooms (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). They're also at greater risk for low academic achievement, emotional and behavioral problems, peer rejection, and school dropout (Duncan et al., 2007; Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000; Shaw, Gilliom, Ingoldsby, & Nagin, 2003; Vitaro, Brendgen, Larose, & Tremblay, 2005). There's no question that students need to learn to self-regulate in order to avoid these negative outcomes. (Committee for Children)
- Well-informed teachers of young children recognize the importance of children's social development. The development of social skills lays a critical foundation for later academic achievement as well as work-related skills (McClelland & Morrison, 2003). (Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson)
- The social skills that children learn when they are young form the basis for subsequent relationships that they develop in later childhood and adulthood (Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). (Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson)
- Because of the importance of social development in the formative early years, all children need to learn and practice social skills. (Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson)
- Learning areas can be large enough to give children the space they need to play together, but small enough to provide an intimate setting for social interaction. (Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson)
- Play also provides a means and opportunity for children to learn and improve their social skills (Barbakoff & Yo, 2002). (Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson)
- Additionally, free play is an effective, spontaneous way for children to apply social skills that have been taught directly. (Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson)
- The classroom is an ideal place for students to learn social skills! Rather than expecting certain kinds of behavior when a student enters a class and then being disappointed, a teacher can save herself time and frustration by emphasizing and giving instruction on how she wants her students to act in her classroom and with each other. Teaching strong social

skills will help ensure that her students are not only successful in their academics in the future, but that they also succeed outside of the classroom with their friends, family, and community. (Kris Zorigian and Jennifer Job)

- School is not only a place where children learn reading, writing and math. It is also a place where they learn to get along with other people and develop social skills. Social skills are the skills we need to interact adaptively in our cultural environment. (Candy Lawson)
- Social skills play a very important role in a child's emotional health and well-being. Without friendships, school can be a very unhappy, lonely place that a child might want to avoid. (Candy Lawson)
- When social skills are absent, educators cannot fully engage students in a variety of learning experiences, especially those that are cooperative. (*Christine D. Bremer and John Smith*)
- Everyday educators struggle to make schools a safe and positive learning environment with the focus for the most part on academics and/or test scores. (Kandace Madise)
- Social skills are life skills, learning to respect others is necessary to become a productive citizen. (Kandace Madise)
- If we as an education system do not teach our students how to cooperate, act responsibly, resolve conflicts, and demonstrate tolerance, the number of angry and aggressive students could greatly increase as well as the incidents of teasing, taunting, bullying, and physical aggression. It is important to teach children to utilize these skills while they are young and receptive. (Kandace Madise)
- Social skills need to be taught consistently to children at early ages and particularly in special education classes. It is essential to expose students to social skills as they may not be educated in these essential life skills at home. Parents may not have the knowledge, time, or parenting skills to instill these basic, yet important skills. These important life and social skills are applied in school and at home thus benefiting the student, educators, parents, and the whole community. Valuable instructional time is lost managing behavior issues, teaching conflict resolution, and providing crisis intervention. (Kandace Madise)
- Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. These skills enable us to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. (NASP Center)
- Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety. (NASP Center)
- In the past, schools have relied exclusively on families to teach children important interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. However, increased negative societal influences and demands on family life make it imperative that schools partner with parents to facilitate this social learning process. This is particularly true today given the critical role that social skills play in maintaining a positive school environment and reducing school violence. (NASP Center)
- You may be hoping your child will learn how to read and write in the first few months of preschool or kindergarten. But there are many other skills that she needs to master before an academic focus is appropriate. Studies show that the most important skills to learn in the beginning of the year are social: cooperation, self-control, confidence, independence, curiosity, empathy, and communication. (Scholastic.com)
- Social skills are so critical to learning that training in these skills should be included in daily academic instruction, according to a recent article in *Preventing School Failure*. (Educational Research)

Research Design:

The first step in this study was to talk with PreK and Kindergarten teachers at the neighboring school. They shared the same concerns: over half of their students come to school with little to no social skills, these teachers are being asked to teach language arts and math at younger ages, recess and time for the children to interact with their peers to work on (and develop) their social skills are being replaced with academic time.

Unfortunately, in all the papers I looked at, I could not find in any that contained any quantitative analysis, therefore, I had to conduct a qualitative analysis on the articles that I found on the internet.

Findings:

- According to the Committee for Children teaching social skills is as important as teaching math or language arts.
- Sharon A. Lynch and Cynthia G. Simpson in their reported that social skills need to be taught during the formative years and that these skills will form the basis for developing relationships in later years.
- Many kindergarten teachers report that over half their students start school lacking good self-regulation.
- Children are naturally egocentric, thinking of themselves as the center of their world, at birth. It takes development and training to teach children to think of others as well as themselves. However, for children to operate successfully in society, they must learn to interact with others in a healthy, positive, and productive manner.
- Students with poor social skill have high rates of expulsion from school.
- All children need to learn and practice social skills during their formative early years.
- Children learn a vast array of skills during play opportunities and interacting with peers.
- Social skills play a very important role in a child's emotional health and well-being.
- Social skills are linked to the quality of the school environment and safety.
- Social skills learning improves students' positive behavior and reduces negative behavior.
- There is strong evidence that social skills predict academic achievement in kindergarten and throughout elementary school.

Recommendations:

- It is important that parents and teachers work together to ensure that our children learn and develop good social skills.
- It is important that Pre-school, Kindergarten, and Elementary school teachers are given time to teach their student how to interact in a positive manner with their peers.
- It is imperative that these teachers are given time for their students to play together, to learn and work on their social skills.
- Instead of parents giving their children a cellphone, tablet, and/or a television to entertain them, these parents need to spend time with their children and have them interact with other children in their neighborhood.
- Social skills cannot be taught in isolation or out of context; and these skills need to be explicitly taught, practiced, and reinforced with other children.
- Our children need to play and interact together to develop their social skills.

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